

OPTIONAL EA, FONSI and DR FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA NUMBER: OR-030-03-012

BLM Office: Vale District, Jordan Resource Area

Proposed Action Title/Type: Morrison Ranch Water Storage Tank Replacement

Location of Proposed Action: T.27S., R.43 E., Sec. 18 E1/2

Applicant (if any): N/A

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:

This proposed action is subject to the following land use plans:

NAME OF PLAN

Southeast Oregon Resource Management Plan

Main, West Little and North Fork Owyhee National Wild and

Scenic Rivers Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

DATE APPROVED

December 2002

September 1993

This plan has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by CFR 1610.5.

REMARKS: The Vale BLM District manages the Birch Creek and Morrison Ranches as historic cultural properties bordering the Owyhee Wild and Scenic River in southeast Oregon. Isolated from normal rural/urban conveniences such as running water, electricity, and telephone lines, the ranch is dependent upon well-water, solar power and diesel generators, and satellite phone or radio communications for maintenance of caretaker living quarters approaching normal livability standards.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: A new well has recently been added at the Morrison Ranch to provide sanitary drinking water. The existing Morrison Ranch water tank is an aging, unsanitary, deteriorating and undersized tank. Due to natural aging processes, the exterior is crumbling and the interior is filled with mud and debris that has been pumped, along with the water, from the nearby Owyhee River. This situation is unacceptable since the tank is intended to serve as a source of potable water for the Morrison lodging facilities at the Birch Creek Historic Ranch. The tank replacement project would remove this out-dated structure and replace it with two adjacent polyurethane tanks in order to increase storage capacity and eliminate water contamination within the tanks.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed tank replacement project would involve driving a backhoe approximately 300 feet up a 10-20% slope, and excavating and lifting out the existing water storage tank. Additionally, the backhoe will need to excavate 10 feet to the south and 15 feet to the east of the current tank, to provide sufficient room for placement of the two new 1200-gallon polyurethane tanks underground and in-line with each other. The new tanks would be backfilled, fitted with an overflow and tank gauge, and connected to the existing buried PVC pipeline which connects downslope to the Morrison waterlines. Existing underground water lines would be flushed and disinfected, and water samples tested for adequate sanitation prior to use as a public drinking water source. Upon completion of backfilling, only the tops of the new tanks would be visible from below. Excess backfill material, if any, would be hauled to a suitable offsite location. Travel of the backhoe from the current Birch Creek Ranch road, uphill to the water tank site would cross a previously disturbed slope now covered with sagebrush and a few common forb and grass species. Surrounding vegetation consists of Wyoming big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* ssp. *wyomingensis*), fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*) and gray rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) with an understory of cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*). The only forbs found in the worksite area were a few scattered tansy mustard (*Descurania* sp.) plants and a single hoary aster (*Maceranthera canescens*). A field exam by BLM resource specialists revealed no obvious cultural sites/artifacts, and no sign of threatened or endangered flora or fauna.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS:						
Critical Element	Affected			Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No			Yes	No
Air Quality		x		T&E Species		x
ACECs		x		Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Cultural Resources	x			Water Quality		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x		Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x
Floodplains		x		Wild & Scenic Rivers	x	
Invasive, Nonnative Species		x		Environmental Justice		x
Nat. Amer. Rel. Concerns		x		Wilderness		x

DESCRIPTION OF IMPACTS: Cross-country travel of the backhoe would result in slightly noticeable damage to low-lying vegetation for the width of the machine and over a distance of about 300 feet. Minor soil disturbance would also occur along this path, from tire action upon the ground. Backhoe operations would create some noise and dust intrusions for the few hours required to complete the excavation and tank replacement. Adverse impacts to air quality (dust and vehicle emissions) and wild & scenic rivers (visual and noise intrusions during tank replacement operations) would be very brief – a matter of a few hours at most – and would be nearly imperceptible thereafter. Visual resource values, from the perspective of both historic cultural and wild and scenic river settings, would be minimally affected in the long term.

DESCRIPTION OF MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL IMPACTS: Existing vegetative cover and the Birch Creek road prism, located between the water tank and the Owyhee River channel, should intercept nearly all soil particles moving downhill during earth-moving activities. The Jordan Resource Area Archeologist will be present to monitor all ground disturbing activity so that if buried cultural material is encountered, work can be suspended until mitigation is completed. Rock terracing around the current tank will be rebuilt around the new tanks. Operations would also be restricted to ensure adequate protection from inadvertent wildfire ignition, by avoiding risky ignition-prone work during periods of high fire danger, and by maintaining adequate tools, personnel and water sources to immediately extinguish ignitions. Cross-country travel of the backhoe would be routed to minimize disturbance to vegetation and soil resources as much as possible. By confining machinery travel to the previously disturbed uphill route and avoiding travel when soil moisture is excessively high, new visual, soil and vegetative impacts would be minimized.

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Vern Pritchard, Vale BLM District Engineer
Natalie Sudman, Jordan Resource Area Archeologist
Jean Findley, Vale BLM T&E Species Specialist

Preparer: Tom Christensen, Jordan Resource Area Outdoor Recreation Planner
Date: March 27, 2003

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Authorized Official: s/Jerry Taylor, Jordan Field Manager
(Signature)

Date: May 19, 2003

DECISION RECORD

It is my decision to implement the proposal as described in EA #OR-030-03-012 with the mitigation measures identified below.

MITIGATION MEASURES/REMARKS:

Restrict project activities accordingly, to minimize chances for wildfire ignition.

Halt activities if Jordan Resource Area Archeologist notes contact with cultural materials during ground disturbing activities. Mitigate impacts as directed by Archeologist.

Direct upslope travel of backhoe to minimize damage and disturbance to existing vegetation and soil surface.

Minimize additional soil excavation around existing underground storage tank, to limit soil erosion and visual and vegetative impacts.

Authorized Official: s/Susan Manezes, Acting Jordan Field Manager Date: June 23, 2003
(Signature)